

The Current

Simcha Felder's last-minute fight to safeguard the yeshiva curriculum

Fiction Corner

A surprise graveyard rendezvous helped him bury a bitter vendetta

EndNote

Six singers remember the unsung deeds that boosted them into the limelight

Mishpacha

המשפחה

JEWISH FAMILY WEEKLY

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The Money Trap

Real People.
Real Money.
Real Mistakes.

IN THE MODERN QUEST FOR HEALTHY EATING, TIMELESS TORAH PRINCIPLES ARE BACK ON THE TABLE

BRITAIN'S JEWS CONFRONT THE CORBYN QUESTION

RABBI EYTAN FEINER SAYS GOODBYE TO RABBI RAPHAEL PELCOVITZ, THE RABBI'S RABBI

WHOSE FAILURE?

YONOSON ROSENBLUM PENS AN OPEN LETTER TO RONALD LAUDER

HAMAS'S BATTLE AT THE BORDER HAS MORPHED INTO A P.R. WAR

When there's no hope left, Rabbi Yisroel Grossberg offers a harbor & haven to high school girls left adrift



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Protecting your health is not just a lifestyle option, but a mitzvah. And that idea hasn't been lost on many health practitioners in their quest to synthesize timeless Torah principles with modern-day understanding of nutrition in helping to combat food abuse and getting people healthier. Because when a Jew eats to fortify the body for spiritual work, each meal becomes a seudas mitzvah

BY *Yael Schuster*

your body's

KEEPER





"THE MAHN
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—Rabbi Eli Glaser



my daily life as well. And by viewing food through the Torah's lens, as a fuel rather than an end unto itself, I find I connect to the essence of Shabbos and Yom Tov on a deeper level, rather than focusing on the food."

Rabbi Glaser says that the Torah teaches us this very point. "Commentaries explain that the purpose of the *mahn* was to reprogram our approach to eating," he says. "The *mahn* came in pre-measured portions, at set times. This was to teach us that eating is meant to have boundaries, to elevate us from our animalistic drive of wanting instant gratification."

Rambam Revival When South African-born David Zulberg was learning in a Jerusalem kollel, he considered his health condition pretty typical: 30 pounds overweight, sluggish-feeling, and living with a bad case of acid reflux. His doctor urged him to make lifestyle changes, but who had the motivation for that?

And then he chanced upon some information that would eventually change his life — that the Rambam had a lot to say about health. A mild curiosity evolved into a seven-year megaproject that involved tracking down and studying the translations of all ten of the Rambam's medical works, and then creating a user-friendly diet approach based on those principles that has helped thousands lose weight and keep it off.

Zulberg, today a popular media personality and certified health coach and fitness specialist, wrote three books on health (*The Life Transforming Diet*, *The 5 Skinny Habits*, and *The Mind Body Synergy Diet*) and designed his food plan around the three main health principles of the Rambam: food quantity, exercise, and food quality, in that order.

Regarding portion size: "Overeating is like poison to the body and it is the main cause of all illness... One should not eat until his stomach is full. Rather, [he should stop when] he is close to three-quarters



“

I have worked alongside coworkers that were in college for five years and spent over \$100,000 on their education—and yet with 1.5 years in PCS I was able to get to the same place. Initially, I thought that I'd be behind the others that went to school for five years. I quickly learned, however, that I was up to speed.

— **Mordechai Sidell**
CPA, Controller, Eastern Union
an alumnus from 2011

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FOR DAVID ZULBERG, A MILD CURIOSITY EVOLVED INTO A SEVEN-YEAR MEGAPROJECT THAT INVOLVED TRACKING DOWN AND STUDYING THE TRANSLATIONS OF ALL TEN OF THE RAMBAM'S MEDICAL WORKS

satiated" (Rambam, *Mishnah Torah, Hilchos Deios*).

The Rambam says that overeating puts a strain on the digestive system that with time will lead to various illnesses. Based on recent studies, the Mayo Clinic, American Obesity Association, and American Diabetes Association have all urged reducing food quantity for improved health.

Regarding exercise: "Without exercise, a good diet alone is not sufficient, and eventually medical treatment will be needed" (Rambam, *Medical Aphorisms*). "Exercise repels the damage done by most of man's bad habits" (Rambam, *Regimen of Health*).

The Rambam defines exercise as physical activity that raises the rate of respiration. The best time to exercise, he says, is at the beginning of the day, before a person eats; exercising after a meal impairs digestion and can lead to illness.

Regarding food quality: "Most illnesses are caused by unhealthy foods" (Rambam, *Hilchos Deios*).

Remarkably, the most current knowledge of various foods' effects on health, brought to light in recent years, was spelled out by the Rambam during the Middle Ages. For example, writes the Rambam, "Foods to be limited include flour that has been sifted until no bran remains (white flour). Fatty food should

be avoided... it cleaves to the organs. The best type of cheese is that which is made from milk whose fat has been removed. Of the different types of meat, one should choose fowl... other harmful products include fried pastries..."

To reduce food quantity, and in line with the Rambam's belief that a person should only eat two main meals a day, one meal a day on the Life Transforming Diet consists of either just fruit, or just vegetables (this wouldn't count as a meal according to the Rambam, but gives one a way to eat the three "meals" a day to which our society is accustomed).

The Rambam suggests eating a single dish at a meal. Digesting various foods at the same time, he maintains, has a deleterious effect on digestion and can lead to illness (there are conflicting viewpoints on this point among nutritionists today). In addition, every food eaten stimulates the appetite separately. When only a single food is eaten, according to the Rambam, the appetite is satiated earlier, and this will prevent overeating. Indeed, multiple published studies have substantiated the Rambam's claim, showing that food consumption increases when there is more variety at a meal, and that increased food variety is associated with increased body weight. One such study published in *Health Psychology* in 2008 showed that children presented with a variety of foods

at a meal ate 42 percent more than those presented with a single food.

Because of this, one of the two main meals a day on Zulberg's plan is either primarily protein, or primarily carbohydrate, but the two are generally not combined. Vegetables can be eaten with either choice. The third meal of the day can include both starch and protein. Eating this way, according to Zulberg, will naturally reduce a person's appetite, resulting in automatic weight loss.

But food is only half the equation — the other half is exercise. According to Zulberg, cardiovascular and strengthening exercises should be done five times a week. He believes that those who follow his plan will benefit from the Rambam's wisdom and gain the benefits of better health and a more energetic constitution.

The Rambam, who lived from 1135 to 1204, was not only one of the greatest Torah scholars in Jewish history, but was also known as the greatest medical expert of his time. While living in Egypt, he had a thriving private practice to which people flocked from great distances. By age 39, he served as royal physician in the court of Sultan Saladin, famed Muslim military leader who fought the Crusaders and later became ruler of Egypt. The Rambam authored ten major medical works in Arabic, which combined his extensive

knowledge of the ancient works of Greek physicians such as Hippocrates and Galen with the most current medical knowledge of his own time. An extensive amount of the Rambam's medical advice proves to be remarkably current, some even at the vanguard of health conversation today (for example, the Rambam suggests eating only free-range cattle).

In addition to his medical tomes, some of the Rambam's halachic works, such as *Hilchos Deios* in the *Mishnah Torah*, are laden with medical directives, although that doesn't necessarily give them halachic weight. "The Maharshal in *Chullin* says that it's *assur* to cite medical advice from the Gemara, lest it not work and will besmirch the good names of those quoted," says Rabbi Moshe Plutchok, rav of Congregation Shaarei Torah in Manhattan Beach, Brooklyn, an eminent talmid chacham with a broad base of historical knowledge. "The Rambam heeded this, and never quoted from the Talmud in his medical works. The general consensus among *poskim* is that these medical directives are not halachically binding."

Still, the main health principles of the Rambam are substantiated with current research and are universally agreed upon today, says Zulberg.

Mrs. H., 50, is a life coach in Israel. Five years ago, in a *shiur* she was giving to a group of women, she shared Rav Shimshon Pincus's approach to *teshuvah*. "He advises you to choose one thing that puts a *mechitzah*, a separation, between you and Hashem, and work that thing through until you're a different person," she says. "I asked myself what annoyed me most about my own *avodas Hashem*, and the embarrassing answer was that I ate like an animal. Eating like a Yid was the *teshuvah* I needed. I was determined, and lost close to 50 pounds.

"Then a friend bought me *The Life Transforming Diet*, and without realizing it, I had pretty much been following

Zulberg's plan, although here it was packaged in a systematic, logical, easy-to-use way. Beforehand, I was a sluggish couch potato. Today, I have a ton of energy, and I feel like I'm giving Hashem the best of myself because my body's functioning so well. I can honestly say that I have zero cravings for unhealthy food — the yetzer hara has given up on me."

Atara Weisberger owns The Tribe Athletics and Fitness, a boutique fitness studio for women in Nutley, New Jersey. "I came across Zulberg's book a while back, and decided to explore it with two clients," says Mrs. Weisberger, who has over 30 years' experience in the fitness and wellness field. "They both wanted diets that didn't count calories and weren't ultra-restrictive, and this plan fit that bill. They lost weight, but neither was able to sustain the diet. One found it took too much food planning, and the other felt hungry on it, perhaps because the diet gives leeway to incorporate more fruit and carbohydrates than some people need. You can theoretically follow the guidelines, and choose fruit for breakfast and starch for lunch, with no protein until supper. This will likely leave you feeling hungry, as it did my client. That's because protein is slow to digest, and so it keeps you feeling full for longer. Second, the high sugar content in the starch and fruit leads to a spike in blood sugar levels, followed by a crash, which makes you feel hungry, and in some sensitive people, can even lead to symptoms of hypoglycemia, such as feeling shaky and dizzy. If the diet is used wisely, though, it can work well as a maintainable plan. Zulberg, for his part, just outlines the principles, while one's personal food choices are out of his purview."

All Systems Go Zulberg has lots of company from other quarters in promoting the Rambam's time-enduring health program. Another is the well-known Rabbi Yechezkel Ishayek, whose



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I am forever grateful to PCS for giving me the foundation I needed to B'H be successful.

- Tzvi Zicherman
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